

## Special Analysis



### LEBANON: Shia Discontent

*Continuing cease-fire violations in the suburban slums of south Beirut, where many Shia Muslims reside, underscore the potential for a renewal of major fighting if President Gemayel remains unable to start the national reconciliation talks. Although the Shia make up the country's largest sect, they have almost no help or attention from the central government. During the fighting last month, Nabih Barri, the leader of the major Shia faction, tried to extract concessions from Gemayel, but he avoided using his Amal militia against the government. If reconciliation talks falter, Barri will be under greater pressure to discard his moderate course.*

Shia leaders oppose partition because it would leave many members of the sect in south Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley under Israeli and Syrian control. They believe that a strong central authority is the only hope for a unified Shia community, and they are pushing for more Shia influence in the government. Barri and other Amal officials, however, are pessimistic about prospects for unification.

Barri wants increased Shia representation in the cabinet. He also will insist on more seats for the Shia in any new national assembly. Shia deputies would push for economic programs that would benefit the sect.

In addition, Barri indicated that he wants Shia to command the Army and head the security and intelligence services, posts which traditionally are reserved for Christians. He probably calculates that this would improve the ability of the Shia to protect themselves.

Last month, when the Lebanese Army battled Druze and Palestinian forces in the mountains of the Alayh and Ash Shuf Districts, the Druze and the Syrians urged Barri to order Shia militiamen in Beirut to stage an uprising against the government. Barri restrained his forces, however, and also refused to join the opposition National Salvation Front. The Amal leader's actions apparently reflect his belief that negotiations with the government hold the best hope for gaining Shia objectives.

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[REDACTED]

### Growing Shia Concern

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Some Shia leaders evidently have concluded that the Christians will not make concessions in the reconciliation talks and that a resumption of full-scale fighting is inevitable. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Tension in Beirut

The situation around Beirut airport remains potentially explosive. Opponents of Barri's moderate approach probably are fostering resentment in the surrounding Shia slums by portraying the Multinational Force as a biased occupation force that in recent weeks has directed return fire only at Muslim targets. [REDACTED]

At the same time, a variety of armed groups that Barri does not control are free to initiate firefights in the area patrolled by the Multinational Force. These groups include the Lebanese Communist Party, the Communist Action Organization, and the Muslim Student Union, a pro-Iranian Shia faction that has sought to undermine Barri's leadership. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Outlook

To reduce the threat of a Shia uprising, government officials have argued that Shia interests can only be advanced by supporting the government and the Army. The Shia, by joining forces with Syrian-backed Lebanese factions against Gemayel, would ensure the fall of the government and the partition they want to avoid. The government's argument was persuasive during the fighting last month, even though Gemayel apparently offered no reward for Shia restraint. [REDACTED]

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Hints of a national redistribution of power, however, almost certainly have caused the Shia to expect that they will benefit from any new arrangements. As a result, some Shia will now be more prone to violence if they believe their aspirations are frustrated. In the event of an uprising in Beirut, the US would find it difficult to draw "red lines" in the capital or to provide significant military support to back up its commitment to the Lebanese Army. [REDACTED]

By pursuing a negotiated settlement of Shia demands, Barri has staked at least part of his prestige on the favorable outcome of the reconciliation process. Protracted or inconclusive talks are likely to erode his influence over the Shia and result in violence that might again propel Lebanon toward an all-out civil war. [REDACTED]

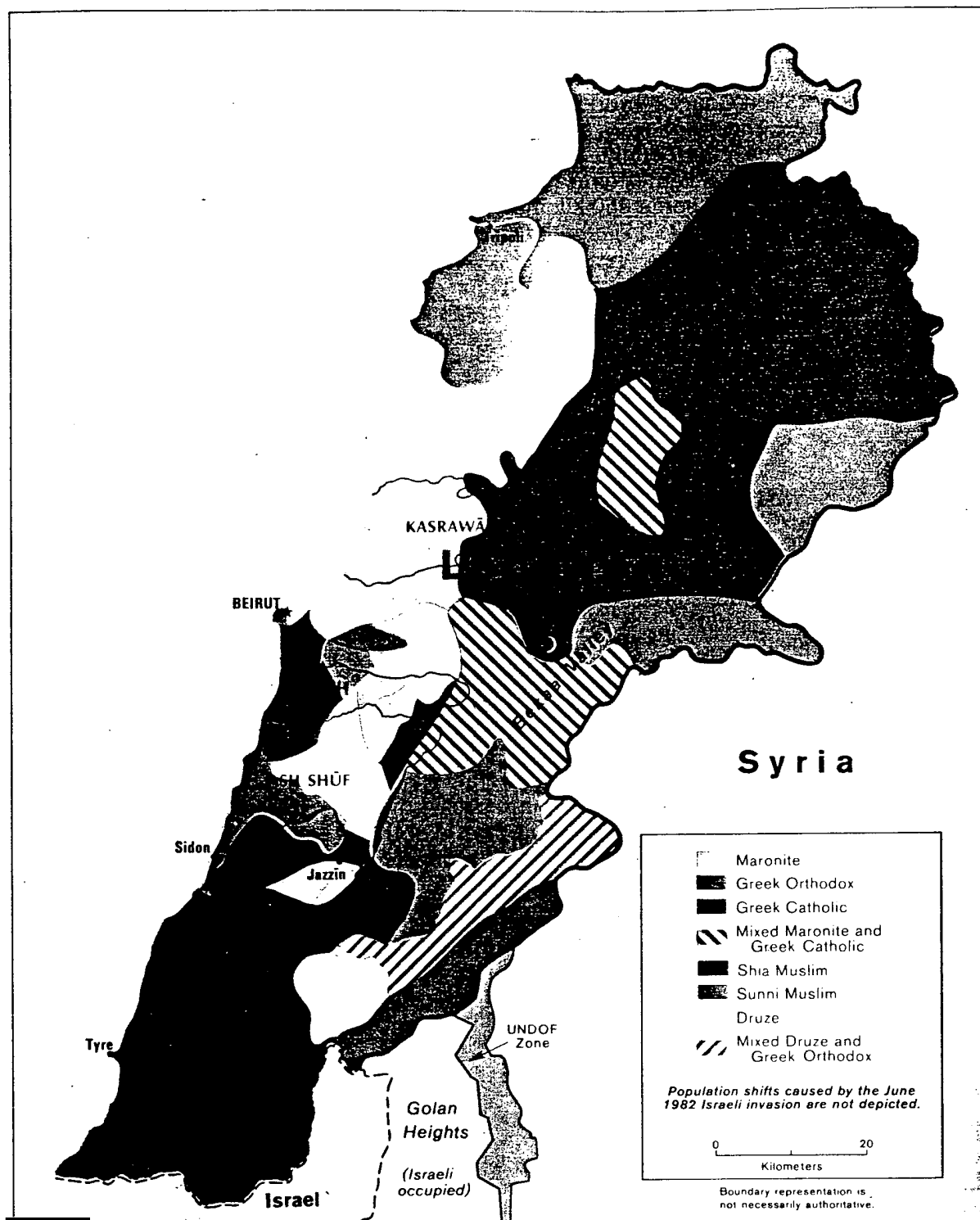
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